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PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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CLARENCE THOMAS OF ILWU LOCAL 10, PCPA
PART 3 OF 3

INTERVIEWEE: CLARENCE THOMAS

INTERVIEWER: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

SUBJECTS: BLACK LONGSHORE WORKERS; ILWU LOCAL 10; APARTHEID; MILLION WORKER MARCH; RANK-AND-FILE; JUNETEENTH; OCCUPY; *NEDLLOYD KIMBERLEY*; GREAT AMERICAN BOYCOTT; BLACK LIVES MATTER; BLACK RADICAL TRADITION; BUSINESS UNIONISM; DANNY GLOVER; CLEOPHAS WILLIAMS; LEO ROBINSON; ANGELA DAVIS

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY:** This is the third meeting that we've had with Conor Casey and Clarence Thomas. This is January 23, 2024.

[00:00:18] To pick up where we were before, the next question in the list is the South African ambassador paid a tribute to Leo Robinson in, I believe, 2013?

[00:00:31] **CLARENCE:** Yes.

[00:00:32] **HARVEY:** That would be pictures 10 and 11. What was your involvement in that?

[00:00:43] **CLARENCE:** I was the chair of that committee. Some of the other people that were on the committee were people like Lawrence Thibodeaux, who was a former member of the International Executive Board, and, of course, Local 10 president, secretary-treasurer. Trent Willis, who is currently president of Local 10. I think at the time, he was either president or business agent. Keith Shanklin, who was Local 34.

[00:01:16] The way that that happened was that I had a chance to meet the South African ambassador at a social gathering at a museum in San Francisco. He was there, and I presented him with Million Worker March t-shirts, just as a gesture of exchanging gifts, and we had a conversation about the anti-apartheid struggle in specifically Local 10.

[00:01:50] One of the things that he had mentioned was that he didn't think that there had been enough recognition given to people in the Bay Area and on the West Coast for their contributions. I asked him to come. I thought perhaps he would send a message or whatever, and he said, "I'll get back to you on that."

[00:02:17] Ebrahim Rasool is his name. A very engaging fellow. I couldn't believe it. [laughing] He got to Local 10 quite a bit before the start of the program.

[00:02:38] I remember talking to him and I said, "Hey, do you need directions?"

[00:02:41] "Oh, no, no. I can find it."

[00:02:44] I was there pretty early, and I never will forget it. It was Frank Cressi—Frank was very involved with BALMA [Bay Area Lognshoremen's Memorial Association] , if you remember him—and he said, "Clarence, the ambassador is here."

[00:02:56] I said, "Where?"

[00:02:57] He said, "He's over in the president's office. He's over there meeting and greeting people."

[00:03:09] Very engaging guy. Very friendly. Not at all what you would necessarily expect of a person of his stature and position. Very engaging. Very friendly.

[00:03:21] We took wonderful photographs. I never will forget. Willie Adams was in one of the photographs. We had rank-and-filers meet him. Very, very friendly guy.

[00:03:33] Much to my surprise, he did have the time—because we had gotten some feedback from the head of the South African Consulate in LA, a man by the name of [Cyril] Ndaba. Ndaba had indicated that he was going to be there from the South African Consulate in Los Angeles.

[00:04:03] We had written letters to people from various countries who had been the beneficiaries of the containers that Local 10 had secured from employers and had sent to Africa for various purposes. The

employees knew that a lot of it went to freedom fighters who were in southern Africa—Mozambique, Angola, South Africans as well—in the way of clothing, educational supplies, medical material and so forth.

[00:04:52] So, we reached out to folks, letting them know that Leo had passed away and we wanted to have them send messages and things of that nature, and they responded. That's Ndaba on the left. He is from the South African Consulate in Los Angeles. The person to his left is James Curtis, who is a rank-and-filer. To James Curtis's left is ambassador Ebrahim Rasool.

[00:05:30] I'm holding the Nelson Mandela Freedom Award, which was presented to ILWU Local 10. Rasool is holding the humanitarian award that was posthumously presented to Leo's widow. She's not pictured in that. Leo's widow is Johnnie Robinson, who died a couple years ago. To my left is my wonderful wife, who played such an important role on that committee. Delores is an educator, and has been involved in education over 35 years. She's been retired, of course. Then to her left is Chris Silvera, who is the longest-serving Teamster principal officer in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. He was present there.

[00:06:36] Then, of course, below you see Leo Robinson. That photo was actually taken on May Day 2008 in San Francisco, when the ILWU shut down all 29 ports on the West Coast, including Vancouver, Canada. That photo was also put on the cover of Leo's memorial program.

[00:07:07] We had well over 200 people that attended Local 10 on that day. It was a wonderful program. We were very grateful. A lot of the people that had been involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, such as the Vukani Mawethu choir. It's a labor group that has singers that sing African freedom songs, labor songs. A brother by the name of Alex Bagwell, who was active in Local 34, was a part of that choir, along with his wife, Harriet. They did a wonderful job. They volunteered.

[00:07:59] I was the master of ceremonies, I guess you'd call it. We had people who participated in the anti-apartheid struggle from ILWU Local 10, like Larry Wright, who was a part of the Southern Africa Liberation Support Committee. He spoke. Herb Burnley, who was a part of the effort in stuffing containers that were sent to southern Africa.

[00:08:35] We had members of ILWU in the Pacific Northwest that were part of the African American Longshore Coalition, which was an organization that Leo Robinson and Lawrence Thibodeaux and others organized for addressing issues of racism, sexism, gender, and all forms of discrimination in the ILWU internally, so that people would be able to have those issues addressed without them having to go outside and sue the union. That was the whole intent.

[00:09:14] It was sanctioned, I believe, in 1992 by the ILWU Longshore Caucus. Dave Arian was in power at that time. It really got off the ground in 1993.

[00:09:30] So, we had people from the Pacific Northwest, like Gabriel Prawl, who is a member of Local 52 now, and he participated in the Jack O'Dell conference that was recently held last week. The title of that particular conference [session] , Harvey, if you don't know, was "Black and Red on the Waterfront." [laughing] That was quite descriptive.

[00:10:01] Getting back to that celebration, we had wonderful video clippings of Channel 2 and other local stations that covered the anti-apartheid struggle events, from the 1970s up to 1984. Leo being interviewed.

Larry Wright. Jack Heyman, who at the time was a member of IBU [Inlandboatmen's Union] when he was involved.

[00:10:42] So, we were able to say, "Here's Leo Robinson speaking in his own voice." He described where he was born and all that sort of thing. It was quite moving. Of course, Leo's family was there—his children, and his wife, Johnnie Robinson.

[00:11:10] I think one of the things about Leo and the anti-apartheid struggle that I thought was so fascinating was that there was a great deal of organizing going on here in the Bay Area and across the country. Local 10 was in the forefront of that. And while Leo was a commanding present, you had white members, like Howard Taylor, Larry Wright and others. So, you had a mixture of people with various ideologies. Some were Pan-Africanists, some were Marxist-Leninists, others were various other tendencies, all coming together around that struggle.

[00:12:11] One of the things I found really fascinating was Leo's involvement with things. Like there were people who were living in the United States that were living underground, who were ANC [African National Congress] members, some attending universities, going to medical schools and things of that nature. Leo, and other people like Dave Stewart, who was a member of ILWU Local 10 who's passed on, who was also one of the organizers of the Northern California Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists that was responsible for getting Black labor involved with the anti-apartheid struggle.

[00:12:51] They were doing things like helping them with their education and supporting them. These were examples of real revolutionary activities—the things that give Local 10 its revolutionary character. Some people describe it as militancy, and it is, but it's more than that.

[00:13:21] I remember there was a book that was published. I can't remember the book and I'm not in the Bay Area at the moment. But there was a book that was published about the anti-apartheid struggle. Of course, Leo Robinson was featured. People like Randall Robinson and all of the people who were very much involved in the movement.

[00:13:43] One of the things that was written about was how Local 10 had collected clothes and other things, and how they would stuff dollar bills and chewing gum inside of the garments that they would send. There was a young man who had actually been the beneficiary of those donations who met Leo and said, "Yeah, I remember getting clothes with dollar bills and bubble gum inside." Really making that movement real. I was not on the waterfront then. I didn't come onto the waterfront until 1985, so these are things that I've learned and read about.

[00:14:36] But, yeah, that event took place on March 23, 2013. People were really surprised. There were threats. We had some threats from some leftist tendencies. I don't know how much credibility they had, but they were saying things like, "We're going to come and picket because the South African ambassador is coming." That was because of the murder of miners that had taken place in South Africa, if you remember that, Harvey.

[00:15:20] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:15:21] **CLARENCE:** Needless to say, they did not do that. They did not come out there and picket. [laughing]

[00:15:27] There were some voices who were saying that the reason why the ambassador had come was because they wanted to, in some way, do something as political cover for the killing of the miners. To me, I dismissed that. I said, "Listen, do you think that the South African ambassador was consulted before they killed those miners? That's not it at all."

[00:15:52] I just think that it happened to be a situation where he was at a certain place and I was at a certain place and I asked him a question and he said, "Yeah, we should have done this a long time ago." Because he was very much aware of Nelson Mandela's speech in Oakland.

[00:16:10] Everywhere I've ever gone, Harvey, when I've done international travels, people know about the anti-apartheid struggle. They know about that, and it's something that the entire ILWU is respected for, and is held in high esteem. So, I dismissed that.

[00:16:34] But I'm giving you now just some little scuttlebut. A lot of people were terribly surprised that the South African ambassador was going to be there, and so was I, and I didn't give any indication that he was coming. I wanted it to be a surprise, and I'm glad that it worked out that way.

[00:17:01] One of the things that was very clear by the ambassador is that while he was acknowledging ILWU Local 10 and Leo Robinson, he was also acknowledging all of those who had participated and had supported the struggle, whether or not you were a part of the divestment—because ILWU had the divested money from their pension funds portfolio.

[00:17:30] As you remember, Ron Dellums, who was a congressman, had sponsored legislation regarding sanctions against South Africa. And Ron, whose father was a member of Local 10, and he and Leo Robinson went to the same high school that I attended—I wasn't there when they were there—I think that all of those—

[00:17:58] I don't want to dismiss or to not acknowledge the importance of Local 34 and their role, because Local 34 had access to shipping manifests and other documentation to let us know that that South African cargo was on a ship.

[00:18:22] I also want to mention that it was Howard Taylor who wrote the resolution calling for the boycott of the Nedlloyd Kimberley in 1984. It was Leo Robinson who made the amendment that was accepted that only the South African cargo be boycotted and not the entire ship. That was an indication of Leo being a strategic thinker.

[00:19:01] I remember watching a video of an interview he had on KTVU. He was explaining that he had worked that vessel. He said, "I worked that vessel last night. We worked the Australian cargo. We have no quarrel with Australia. Our quarrel is with South Africa."

[00:19:26] That had a way of raising people's awareness. I think it was very effective that it was done that way, but I also wanted to give credit to the historical, acknowledged importance of that resolution that was submitted by Howard Taylor.

[00:19:47] That was really quite radical because we were defying Taft-Hartley and our contract and everything, because that was Local 10 saying, "Hey, we're not touching [the South African cargo] ."

[00:20:01] It didn't have anything to do with the community boycott and us not crossing the picket line.

[00:20:07] " No. We're going to be there. We're going to work the ship, but not that South African cargo."

[00:20:15] I know Bill Proctor, who was a part of the Southern Africa Liberation Support Committee, was operating a winch, and told guys, "Come on up. I'm not touching that South African cargo," when it was said to him,

[00:20:31] "That's all that's down here now is South African cargo."

[00:20:34] "I'm not touching it. C'mon up out the hole." [laughing]

[00:20:39] It was so fascinating to see all of those groupings of people, the various tendencies, coming together to do this work.

[00:20:54] **HARVEY:** That's very helpful in terms of a good amount of detail. What about the May Day 2015 Port of Oakland shutdown over the Middle Eastern wars?

[00:21:06] **CLARENCE:** Do you mean 2008?

[00:21:06] **HARVEY:** No, 2015 May Day. What was your involvement in that? That's picture 12.

[00:21:14] [Transcriber Note: The May Day 2015 shutdown was about police action. The 2008 Port of Oakland shutdown was about the war in Iraq.]

[00:21:16] **CLARENCE:** Let me say that it's important for people to understand that the idea of doing protests on May Day emanated from those of us who were involved in the Million Worker March. What I mean by that is there was a resolution that came from Local 10. Jack Heyman had written a resolution calling for the action for the 2008 West Coast shutdown.

[00:21:46] But even before that, going back to 2004-2005, I had submitted resolutions regarding us acknowledging May Day and taking actions, but it was rejected during those times. So, there was a continuation of May Day activities, and my role was always one of working on community-labor committees.

[00:22:17] We used to meet at Local 10 and we'd have various forces from other unions, other antiwar activists, coming together a lot of times in the Henry Schmidt Room in Local 10. Writing press releases explaining what May Day was all about. Participating in rallies, that was my role.

[00:22:49] Of course, my familiarity with the antiwar movement—which, Harvey, I don't want to date you, but it was formerly called the peace movement. It became antiwar after Iraq. Then they said the antiwar movement. Probably even with the Vietnam War.

[00:23:15] Anyway, to make a long story short, I think it's important for people to understand this. In many ways, Local 10 was somewhat isolated with regard to the antiwar issue in this regard. Because of our history—going back to Harry Bridges—when there was a community picket line that came out to protest when Ethiopia was invaded by Italy, or the action taken by community—I call it the community blockade of 1939 after Japan invaded Manchuria, and Bridges's position in regard to the Korean War. We have a long history of that.

[00:24:20] It's radical, and so a lot of times when we're taking actions and shutting down stuff, other people don't have the ability to do it, and they see us as being really left—which we are left, we were left. [laughing] And I think that there were always these issues of the language, how you write a resolution and all, and the May Day piece.

[00:24:46] I think it's important for me to say this, Harvey. The reclaiming of May Day was one of the demands that came out of the Million Worker March. We wanted to put together some kind of a program. We didn't want the Million Worker March to be a one-day event. We wanted it to have some continuity.

[00:25:10] So, two things we wanted. We said we wanted to reclaim May Day, and also, International Working Women's Day. The reason why we wanted to reclaim May Day is because we thought that the Million Worker March represented the long history of radical and militant action by the trade union movement.

[00:25:36] We thought that history had been hidden; that people had forgotten about it and didn't understand its importance in terms of what it meant to not only organized labor, but to non-union members as well; and the response of the state to this action, and how vicious it was; and tying those things together.

[00:26:06] The actions that we've taken over the years, Harvey, going from 2018, 2015, 2016—for a while there, we were doing a port shutdown on every May Day, but it was interrupted at a couple of points that we had different leadership in.

[00:26:29] I will say this. When that resolution was adopted to shut down all 29 ports on the West Coast, I have to be honest with you, Lawrence Thibodeaux introduced that resolution at the caucus. Much to our amazement, it was people who were against such actions in the past who came up and were very supportive of it, because they said, "We've been waiting around for our Democratic friends to stop this war. They're not. Our children are over there dying and getting maimed and all the rest, and it's time for us to do something."

[00:27:12] The lesson that I took from that was that those of us who had been talking about this and supporting some kind of action like this for years, and planting seeds, and doing things, other folks finally understood its relevance and importance, and it became very clear, early, that that motion was going to pass at that 2008—

[00:27:39] And I think that I did not have to do a lot of speaking about that, which was good because other voices—people from the Pacific Northwest and other parts of the country—were very much supportive of that. That carried over.

[00:28:01] One of the remarkable things, Harvey, was the response of the employers. They were very much against it in 2008. They filed an NLRB charge on us. But in subsequent years, they figured out we could either agree to letting the ILWU rank-and-file have their union meeting on a given day—which happened in 2008 when all of us took our union meeting on May 1—versus Local 10, where we would let the employers know we

voted on this. We would give them maybe two months' notice. They'd say, "We'll get back to you." In most instances than not, they said, "We'll rearrange our schedule." Then they'd send out notices to people.

[00:28:56] I always thought that that was a sign of the employer recognizing the importance of rank-and-file solidarity and respecting it, knowing that things really could be—we would be asking for eight hours, but if they had rejected it, the employers knew, you know, they might do something on the day shift and the night shift. [laughing]

[00:29:23] So, they started agreeing. They said, "Okay. You want that day? We'll let people know."

[00:29:32] Then they would go to the public and say, "Well, you know, shipping is light that day, and we've worked it out," because they wanted to be able to save some face and not make them feel like they were acquiescing. But they were, and I think that that was really important, and we really want to get people to understand the importance of May Day.

[00:29:53] Now, the employer, when we want to do May Day, the employer had no problems. That's been the case for Local 10. It's also been the case in Seattle for a number of years, too. Gabriel Prawl and people like [?Lee Paul?] in Local 19, who were very active around the Million Worker March. Now, they have a program up there called the Revels Cayton Initiative. I don't know if you remember Revels Cayton?

[00:30:24] **HARVEY:** Yes.

[00:30:26] **CLARENCE:** That's another subject, but anyway, the May Day thing has been going on strong since 2005. I think it's important for people to realize that the real big deal that happened in 2006 was the Great American Boycott around the Latinos who were protesting this terrible anti-immigration legislation.

[00:30:58] They had what they called the Great American Boycott, and Latinos did not go to work that day. I remember being at a May Day rally. We didn't take off that year, 2006. But I remember getting an email which said that 90 percent of the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach were inactive because the truckers had taken off that day, and I reported that at the rally, demonstrating the power—that was truckers that day that did that.

[00:31:42] I think it's also important to point out that people like Danny Glover—who, on the majority of those May Day actions that we took, was present, and he spoke. People, of course, like celebrities, and he always lent his time to come to Local 10 and to speak. Other people, of course, did the same thing, but it was important to mention him.

[00:32:18] But my role in that was always organizing and working with other unions, getting them to participate in rallies. Then it turned out that there was a rally that would be held in San Francisco, and then one in Oakland by the Latinos, so it became a really important day for the trade union movement in the Bay Area, and I'm glad that Local 10 had a lot to do with that.

[00:32:52] **HARVEY:** That's very helpful, actually. Did you also want to talk a little bit about the Black Lives Matter in recent times?

[00:33:04] **CLARENCE:** Yeah.

[00:33:07] **HARVEY:** Pictures 17 and 19. Your involvement in that. This is pretty recent times.

[00:33:16] **CLARENCE:** This is pretty recent times, Harvey. The Black Lives Matter, the slogan, is so critical in terms of focusing in on the obvious: Black lives do matter.

[00:33:45] The whole question about the police and killings of Black and people of color, even when we were supporting Oscar Grant, going back to 2010. I always tried to make the link between Bloody Thursday in 1934 and the police killings of [Howard] Sperry and [Nick] Bordoise, and letting people understand why it is that ILWU—and particularly Local 10 members—understand the relationship between the police and the community because who the police represent, and tying that in to 1934, and the police killing of these union members. One was a member of the Marine Cooks and Stewards, the other ILWU. We were the ILA at that time.

[00:34:46] But tying that in, and then explaining how our members fought against the police, the National Guard, the vigilantes, and other reactionaries during the 1934 strike, and how every July 5, we take off from work for 24 hours to show the connection, and that it's not just the police doing terrible things to the Black community, but that the police represent the state. They represent power and privilege. They don't represent the community. And when there's a picket line, the police come out—not to support the workers, they come out to protect the interest of the boss. That was very important to get people to understand that relationship.

[00:35:42] But let me just say this. The George Floyd thing has brought about such an awareness. We had a tremendous turnout on that day, Juneteenth 2020. But it's important to mention that the entire Longshore Division voted. The presidents had a conference call and they unanimously supported taking an action on that day. I was very proud to see our leadership up and down the coast taking a position on that.

[00:36:31] It was remarkable. We talked about police terror, ending systemic racism. And Angela Davis gave such a—oh, she gave such a stellar speech, Harvey and Conor, and I just have to tell you, it was one of the great speeches that I've ever heard her give. She was Covid-compromised because of her age. We had about 20,000 people out there.

[00:37:04] She did something quite remarkable. She taped her speech, so it was pretaped. It was played over the loudspeaker, and she stood up in her Cooper convertible, and she started out by saying, "When the ILWU takes a stand, the world feels its reverberation."

[00:37:31] Then she went on to explain that in 1940, we supported the Japanese against internment. Then she talked about other struggles, going all the way up to the anti-apartheid struggle. It brought tears to my eyes. It was a great speech, and the people responded to her in wonderful fashion.

[00:37:54] We talked about, of course, Juneteenth, what it meant, but we also talked about local issues that were happening in the Bay Area, specifically the attempt by John Fisher, the owner of the Oakland A's, to [laughing] basically steal public land for the purpose of building a ballpark, and condominiums, and a hotel at the third-busiest port on the West Coast, the Port of Oakland, and how you had Democrats who were supporting this effort.

[00:38:36] People like Ralph Bonta, who's now the Attorney General. He was the state assemblyman at the time. You had other people who were supporting this, and we're saying, "Hey, the Port of Oakland is the economic engine of all of northern California."

[00:38:58] The Oakland A's have a home, but they wanted to be on the waterfront. I understood why they wanted to be there, because of the ambience. But I'm saying, "This is a working port." They even wanted to keep a couple of cranes as a symbol of what was once a working waterfront where the stadium was going to be. [laughing] I'll never forget, I was at a meeting of the Port Commission and I said, "How dare they leave a crane up there?"

[00:39:40] They wanted the 55 acres at the Port Howard terminal. Then they wanted the property at the Coliseum site. It was such an outrageous thing, Harvey, that we even had the employers on our side. The employers were against this.

[00:40:01] We had an organization called the East Oakland Stadium Alliance. It was made up of people from SSA, and it was importers, exporters. We had, of course, ILWU. We had the other maritime unions. The Teamsters and the building trades were in favor of this thing going on.

[00:40:41] **HARVEY:** Oh, yeah.

[00:40:45] **CLARENCE:** That was one of the issues.

[00:40:48] **HARVEY:** Melvin Mackay was involved in that, too.

[00:40:51] **CLARENCE:** Melvin was president of ILWU Local 10. I was retired. [laughing] Melvin Mackay was president, so Melvin was the point man with regard to the ILWU Local 10. I had a very good working relationship with Melvin, and so did Lawrence Thibodeaux. It was all hands on deck, Harvey.

[00:41:19] **HARVEY:** You had a big parade. Remember the big parade? I went on that parade.

[00:41:23] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, right! The other thing is we organized a wonderful community-labor event at Acts Full Gospel Church in East Oakland, which is now the bastion of the Black community. Bishop Bob Jackson heads that church, and he was a member of that organization, East Oakland Stadium Alliance.

[00:41:51] We organized an event at the church. Danny Glover was one of the featured speakers. We had ILWU members speaking, members of the community. It was quite something, and it was great and it was a way of galvanizing everyone.

[00:42:11] One thing I want to mention here very quickly is that John Fisher, who owned the A's, is also a major player in what they call charter schools. We were able to make a connection between the two, and out of that came an organization called Schools & Labor Against Privatization, otherwise known as SLAP. That has been very effective in being able to thwart that effort, and now the A's are headed to Las Vegas.

[00:42:49] One of the demands was to stop the privatization of public land. That was one of the demands that we had, along with ending systemic racism and stopping police terror. There was a tremendous turnout.

[00:43:07] I was retired at the time, but I felt an obligation as a third-generation longshore worker. I did not want my grandchildren or other people in the community asking me, "How did this happen? How did you allow this right-wing billionaire to build a hotel at the third-busiest port?" That would have been very difficult.

[00:43:32] When I was in Local 10, I always had my grandfather and my father in my head about the challenges that ILWU members face, and "What was your role in trying to protect the union?"

[00:43:54] Because I think each generation is called upon to do their part to fight for democracy, to fight for the issues and the gains that we've made that other generations have been responsible for.

[00:44:11] That was a very remarkable day and a great event, Harvey. Juneteenth was quite something that day.

[00:44:23] **HARVEY:** Since you've mentioned Angela Davis and Danny Glover, they were made honorary members of Local 10.

[00:44:33] **CLARENCE:** Yes.

[00:44:34] **HARVEY:** Were you involved in that procedure? They are pictures 18 and 20, I think.

[00:44:39] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, Harvey, I did. One of the things that I was involved with, along with others, was writing the resolutions on the plaque. I guess one of the reasons why I did that was because of some of my history of being involved in the struggle and the movement, being involved with the Panthers, being involved with the Black Student Union and the long student strike. But that formed somewhat of a perspective.

[00:45:19] But let me just say this as far as Angela Davis was concerned. That idea was not mine, it was someone else's. I think Trent Willis might have come up with the idea. But suffice it to say that when Angela spoke and gave that great speech on Juneteenth, she said—and I'm paraphrasing—"You know, I was thinking the other day had I not been a college professor, I would have liked to have been a dock worker, or a member of the ILWU."

[00:45:53] I have to tell you, she would have made a hell of an ILWU member. [laughing] There's no doubt about that. And she would have been a person of leadership, too. I'm not saying she'd have been running the union, but she certainly would be in the leadership in Local 10 and been a part of that caucus to the convention.

[00:46:21] It's important to dive in and remember that when Cleophas was president in the early 70s, he allowed Local 10 to host the first rally for Angela Davis by a labor institution.

[00:46:44] She's very fond of the ILWU, not just because of—she has a personal connection, because in the 1971 convention, Cleophas presented that resolution calling for support of Angela Davis for her to get bail. He tied that in with fighting the scourge of racism within the trade union movement. She never forgot that, so it was very personal for her.

[00:47:20] I think that connecting those dots—and Peter Cole recently wrote that making Dr. King—Dr. King was made an honorary member by Local 10, but Paul Robeson was made an honorary member of the ILWU at a convention in 1943. What all of those luminaries—some of the most important people in the 20th century—speak to is what the ILWU is all about. I thought it was a great idea.

[00:48:00] Her history, I think, from a personal point of view—growing up in a family of leftists in Birmingham, Alabama, and being introduced to struggle as a young person whose parents were educated, and who were leftists—some people said they belonged to Communist front organizations, but they were definitely part of the Black left in Birmingham.

[00:48:34] I think that those kinds of experiences when you're young have a great deal to do with serving as the foundation, in terms of what your moral compass is, what your politics are. I know that that was the case for me and also the case for Danny Glover. So, I had a role in getting those resolutions together, framing them and taking that responsibility.

[00:49:02] I thought both of those individuals have had a long connection with the ILWU. Danny, when he was a student at San Francisco State, worked as a casual. That's something I never did, but during the strike in 1968, Local 10 provided casual jobs to professors and students who were on strike. As a matter of fact, the ILWU Local 10, Local 34 and Local 6 all supported strike sanctions for the AFT at San Francisco State.

[00:49:45] Then Danny's role in the anti-apartheid struggle and all of the things that he's been involved in, with the Million Worker March and so forth, he has a great affinity for the ILWU Local 10 and its members, going back to the anti-apartheid days.

[00:50:03] So, yeah, both of those individuals have contributed a great deal to the struggle. I know that for Danny, he has been in the tradition of Paul Robeson and Harry Belafonte and Nina Simone, others who have used their celebrity status on the part of the movement, and paying a price for that in terms of career choices that they've had available to them. I think that that's important to document and to show.

[00:50:48] Paul Robeson said, "An artist has to support either freedom or slavery. You've got to choose between one of the two." And it's true. I think we can go back to the March on Washington in 1963, where Harry Belafonte was able to get Hollywood stars and luminaries to come to the March on Washington, people like Charlton Heston and Tony Curtis and any of a number of people. Burt Lancaster. They were all there on that day because of Harry and the respect they had for Harry, the role that Harry played in the Civil Rights Movement, and the influence that Harry had on people like Danny Glover. I thought that those were very important.

[00:51:47] Another thing that we could say about Dr. King and Angela and Danny and all those, and even Paul Robeson, Angela was a Communist, but the others [laughing] had been accused of being so, including Dr. King, or having relationships with people in the Communist Party.

[00:52:13] I thought it was sort of ironic [when] I was making that point when Angela was made an honorary member. There were only a few people in the audience who really could understand what it was that I was saying because they were older, and they were around. Some of the younger people couldn't quite figure it out, but I still made that point. But Angela was very thrilled and very supportive.

[00:52:44] One other little quick story that you will find interesting. When we did May Day—this was when we were coming out of Covid and there was a big May Day rally, and I'll never forget—we marched all the way from Local 10 to City Hall. [laughing] And that was a long walk. Angela was in really good shape, but she had enough sense to get into an Uber at the conclusion of the rally and take off. She had a commitment.

[00:53:18] Delores, my wife, and I were so full of adrenaline, we thought we could make it all the way back. That walk back to the hall, we couldn't make it. [laughing] We had to finally get a ride after we got close to a parking lot where some of the others were.

[00:53:35] We had to spend three or four days in the house because we hadn't been walking. I never will forget admiring what good shape Angela was in as we were marching, but she had enough good sense to not walk back. We always laughed that we should have taken a ride. People were asking us, "Want a ride back to the hall?" We were so full of adrenaline, we said, "Naw, we can make it," but it was very difficult on the way back. I'll never forget that incident. [laughing]

[00:54:09] **HARVEY:** That's a great story. Just a tiny bit about family life. You bring up Delores that day. She's an educator and a photographer and so forth.

[00:54:21] **CLARENCE:** Let me just say this. I always said that I knew my wife was smarter than me for a number of years, but I didn't realize how much smarter she was than me until we started this publishing company called DeClare Publishing.

[00:54:37] Our first book, Mobilizing in Our Own Names: The Million Worker March, which is an anthology, she was one of the editors on that book. There were several, but she was one of them. I remember her telling me, "You know, I didn't realize what an eye I have for grammar and editing."

[00:55:00] I started calling her the "Comma Queen" because, in terms of her punctuation, listen—you know about that, Harvey—

[00:55:13] **HARVEY:** Yes. "Comma Cop" works, too.

[00:55:17] **CLARENCE:** Yeah. She was so wonderful with that. Also, on Cleophas's book—Cleophas Williams, My Life Story in the International Longshore & Warehouse Union Local 10—she was the editor on that. She was the editor on that book.

[00:55:34] But she has played an important role in so many activities that I've been involved in, and rank-and-file members know that, too. She's a person who has been in education. She started out as a teacher with the counseling, and then went into administration.

[00:55:58] I'll tell you a funny story. On the day that the South African ambassador came to Local 10 and spoke, we were taking photographs. I made a point to have Willie Adams, who was the International Secretary-Treasurer, come over to meet the ambassador.

[00:56:20] As we were taking photos, Delores said, "Okay, time's up. We've got to get you to the hall."

[00:56:29] She's used to organizing activities and punctuality and all, and people were like, "We're having so much fun."

[00:56:42] She said, "No, we've got to get you to the hall. We've got to start the program on time."

[00:56:47] That's so much a part of who she is. The rank-and-file know her. They're aware of her contributions. She does not like to be acknowledged as such, but we always do.

[00:57:05] There are so many people—spouses—who have been part of it. She was never in the Women's Auxiliary, but she follows in the tradition of people like Sister Sadie Williams, who will be 100 years old on February 25, , and she has the hall reserved.

[00:57:33] I asked her, "Is it going to be in the Henry Schmidt Room?"

[00:57:36] She said, "No, it's going to be in the Dispatch Hall." [laughing]

[00:57:41] But Delores follows in that tradition of wives who really understand and appreciate and are grateful for the benefits that this union has provided to her as a spouse of an ILWU member, and has no hesitation in contributing and doing things, and doesn't want to be put out front. She's done a great deal.

[00:58:12] I can say the same thing about my mother. She's come to various rallies and events, and has been interviewed, and talked about how she is so—the first thing she always asks is, "Is there going to be any changes in the medical coverage?"

[00:58:29] I said, "No, Mom, there's not going to be any change."

[00:58:32] She loves Kaiser. [laughing]

[00:58:35] I always tease her. I say, "Mom, you've been on the payroll for over 80 years. You were the daughter of a longshore worker, the wife of a longshore worker, and surviving spouse and the mother of a longshore worker." She made 95 this year.

[00:58:55] She loves the ILWU, and understands its importance, and what it has meant to not only her family but to so many families that she knows of in the Bay Area.

[00:59:11] **HARVEY:** That's great. Clarence, are you also active in the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association at all at this point?

[00:59:20] **CLARENCE:** Yes, Harvey. After much vacillation, because I move around a lot, for the last two years, I've been in attendance at the ILWU pensioners' convention. The first one I attended was in . . .

[00:59:42] **HARVEY:** [Long Beach] .

[00:59:43] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, in Long Beach, and then this past. I'm now on the Executive Board. I'm active in the pensioners' group here in San Francisco. Lawrence Thibodeaux heads that up.

[00:59:59] I didn't think that I was going to be able to do it as I'm too busy—I'm doing books, I'm traveling—but I've taken time. And I'm glad that I am doing it, too, because I think that it's important for us to contribute our time and effort however we can.

[01:00:15] **HARVEY:** That's good. Conor, did you have any questions at this point? I often ask Conor to pick up somewhere where I may have missed.

[01:00:33] **CONOR:** Thanks for asking. Usually the question I ask has to do with anti-apartheid activism and international solidarity, and I think the pleasure of this interview is that this is a lot of that, so I don't think I have my traditional questions. Thank you.

[01:00:51] **CLARENCE:** It is 12:15. We've gone 15 minutes over.

[01:01:00] **HARVEY:** I think it's 11:15.

[01:01:03] **CLARENCE:** You know what it is, Harvey? I'm an hour ahead because I'm in Arizona now. That's the reason, so let's keep rolling.

[01:01:12] **HARVEY:** Clarence, what have I missed? What big topic have I missed out on? Anything you can think of?

[01:01:49] **CLARENCE:** One of the things that I think we really haven't talked about specifically—we've talked about it in a way because there's no way not to talk about it—but I think that the whole issue is the Black radical tradition, and what it has meant in terms of people like Leo Robinson and his influence in the ILWU. I've said publicly that I think that he's one of the more important rank-and-file leaders of the entire ILWU, but specifically in the longshore industry.

[01:02:33] I say that because his activism is so much a part of what the founders of the union were about. Number one, a firm belief in rank-and-file democracy. He was an internationalist. He understood the relationship between local, national and international issues. He was a Pan-Africanist. He had joined the Communist Party for a while.

[01:03:12] But one of the things I've found most remarkable about him is that he talked about a woman by the name of Geraldine Johnson as being his mentor. I thought he might have mentioned someone like William "Bill" Chester or Archie Brown. But he told me it was a woman by the name of Geraldine Johnson, and Geraldine was one of the first Black women to graduate from LSU.

[01:03:43] She was one of the cofounders of the Northern California chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists that played such an important role in terms of the anti-apartheid struggle; the resolution calling for Dr. King's birthday to be a national holiday.

[01:04:05] That came out of CBTU, Leo Robinson and Dave Stewart and others brought that resolution to Local 10, and it went all the way to the Longshore Caucus, and was eventually acted upon; one of the first unions to have that as a paid holiday.

[01:04:25] But he mentioned Geraldine, and I thought it was so remarkable that an African American woman—he described her as being his teacher, and he said that when she gave an order, you did it unequivocally, even if you didn't know how. [laughing] And that kind of stayed with me.

[01:04:54] I was kind of surprised, and I guess part of it is because men have an idea—men are influenced—that's not to say that they didn't, but he came out and publicly talked about her and what she meant to the movement.

[01:05:14] But I think that the Black radical tradition is so important to mention because, as we stated before, Paul Robeson was made an honorary member in 1943 by the International, and he certainly was part of the Black radical tradition.

[01:05:35] Over the years, we've had so many examples of radical Black leadership in the ILWU. We could talk about William "Bill" Chester, of course. Cleophas Williams. Cleophas, in this book, Cleophas: My Life Story, said that the burden of being Black was such that he couldn't see being red, too, being Black and red. [laughter]

[01:06:08] But Cleophas was a progressive. People would not necessarily see him as the Black left, as such. He did things that were radical, but I think that that tradition of him and other people who came before him who may not have been red, but who were militant Black trade unionists is something that is a very important part of the ILWU Local 10. I think that that's important.

[01:06:46] I also think that it's important for me to mention that there has been a departure from that radicalism in the last, I would say, since Brian McWilliams left office. I think that the trajectory of the union, or the ideology of the union, has been much more business unionist origins.

[01:07:14] What I mean by that is that we can see that Bridges said, "We're left, and we're proud of it." He made a point of describing what he saw as the leadership of the union being, if we can look at people like him, and Henry Schmidt, and what they did in 1934.

[01:07:38] And I think that the business unionism philosophy is not radical; that it is much more oriented toward labor partnerships; relationships with the employer. We could look at, for example, the contract that we had, I believe, in 2015 that was a contract that was an extension. We've never had that before.

[01:08:11] Now, people could say, "You know, Clarence, we got something positive out of that. We got the increase in our pensions." That's very, very true, but we can talk about EGT, for an example, and how that contract unfolded. These are examples, to me, of a departure from rank-and-file democracy, and I think that the things that we mentioned, such as the Million Worker March, May Day, Juneteenth—all of those things are all part of the radical tradition that has made the ILWU what it is. And the ILWU is not the only union that I would say has been involved with this business unionist approach.

[01:09:07] Let me just say this for the record. Business unionism doesn't mean that you're not necessarily militant anymore, but it's more focused, I think, on the issue of the contract; much more focused on trying to avoid strikes, taking strikes off the table; saying that we can't have a strike.

[01:09:37] I think the influence of attorneys in the unions involved for business—those sorts of things—these are all well-documented things that we can—and I talk about them in my book. And there's nothing wrong with being able to discuss these things because Harry always said, "When you start reading about yourself"—and he talked about the newspapers and the magazines where the employers are speaking glowingly about you—"it's time to change your leadership."

[01:10:12] But let me just say this, though. Even during Harry's leadership, people like Leo Robinson and Lawrence Thibodeaux and others were critical of him with the contract in 1970—if you remember, Harvey—and the whole idea of the steadymen situation.

[01:10:38] I wasn't present, but Harry was being critical of those who were critical of him because they were putting out fliers and leaflets, and he didn't like it. He was getting high-handed, and someone said to him, "Hey, Harry, that's the same thing you did in 1934." And the room exploded with laughter.

[01:11:04] What I'm talking about are things that have happened over the years. I'm not saying that Harry was a business unionist. That's not what I'm getting at. But criticizing the leadership in terms of younger people, and what folks see as the future of the struggle, the ILWU has been hit with this lawsuit.

[01:11:29] Let me just say this. This never happened before. [laughing] With all of the radicalism that we've done over the years, Harvey, that has never happened.

[01:11:43] **HARVEY:** It happened in 1949, 50, 51, 52. There was a case called [?Cason?] Northwest. We were sued at that time, but the money was not such that bankruptcy was required and they settled and paid a fee.

[01:12:00] **CLARENCE:** Okay, thank you, Harvey.

[01:12:02] **HARVEY:** Something Spruce Company. [Juneau Spruce Corporation v International Longshoremen Warehousemen Union] Same beef, a secondary boycott.

[01:12:10] **CLARENCE:** Let me just say this. I think that the radicalism is certainly something that has felt second nature to me, having grown up in an ILWU family and knowing something about the ILWU's history from just being around longshore workers when I was a kid, and the esteem and the respect that they had for Bridges and what he had done specifically for Black longshore workers—of course, to all workers who were union members, but specifically to Black workers who, some had come off the cotton fields, or who had worked on the railroad, or were sharecroppers. And they came into the most democratic, militant and integrated unions in the country when they joined the ILWU.

[01:13:09] I remember Leo Robinson saying that next to Jesus Christ was Harry Bridges. You couldn't tell Black longshore workers back in the day anything negative about him. You might get knocked out, challenging.

[01:13:22] And during that 1970 contract struggle, the youngsters were saying no, they didn't like the issue of the steadymen, and Harry was saying that this is inevitable, this is coming. I think we have to still tip our hats to

Harry and the leadership for being the first union to negotiate a contract dealing with the whole issue of automation, and what that represented.

[01:13:51] Because he was right, it is inevitable; but the question now becomes, for whose benefit does that technology serve? It cannot be the benefit of the employers exclusively. That cannot happen. They could not have built this industry without us, and we're not going to allow that to happen.

[01:14:15] I'm 76 and I'm still active, and I'm very proud to be a part of this interview, Harvey, because I think it is important for people to know that there are radical traditions in this union, and the continuity of those issues, and also, to let people know that that has not always been the case.

[01:14:42] I never will forget. Do you remember Sister [Ah Quon] McElrath from Hawaii?

[01:14:48] **HARVEY:** Oh, yes.

[01:14:50] **CLARENCE:** She made a speech one day. She said, "The ILWU has survived radical leadership, and good leadership and bad. It has survived." [laughing]

[01:15:04] This is an institution. Members come and go, and I think that at the end of the day, I always felt that I wanted to contribute in some way to a union that has meant so much to me and my family. Local 10's and ILWU's politics is rough and tumble. You cannot have thin skin and be a part of this union if you want to be in leadership.

[01:15:34] I have a great deal of respect for this institution. I think that it allows us to be critical of the leadership. One of the things that I found admirable about what Cleophas said. He said, "ILWU was a leadership union that believed in Harry Bridges's vision, but they were also men who were not afraid to take him on." I think that that is so much a part of what the ILWU represents.

[01:16:08] Also, its relationship to the community. No matter how the employer tries to talk about—this always comes up during contract—how much money we make, which is a strategy that one would find to be viable because of the fact that we don't have national living wages in this country.

[01:16:33] But that never seems to work with the ILWU. Why? Because the community knows what we stand for and what we believe, and that we take positions on things that are supportive of the community. For example, in terms of COVID-19. Remember when they brought that Princess vessel into the Port of Oakland? That typically goes into Pier 27 in San Francisco where the passenger vessels go. They brought it to Oakland with people who had Covid.

[01:17:08] So, the leadership—Trent Willis, Keith Janklin, who was president of Local 34—talked about those things. They explained to the community about what was going on, letting them know, "Hey, we're not only interested in what's happening with our members. We're also interested in where this refuse is going to be taken, or this debris, from the vessel—where it's going to be going. Is it going to be traveling through the city of Oakland? Where is it going? All of these things."

[01:17:40] People have a sense—the Juneteenth, the anti-apartheid struggle—because you had churches in the Bay Area—Black churches, other churches—that were working on the anti-apartheid committee. So, people

have seen in so many instances, Harvey, the union standing for the working class and for the oppressed, and so people don't allow the propaganda of the employer.

[01:18:11] People want to be longshore workers. Everybody wants to be a longshore worker now. [laughing]

[01:18:18] **HARVEY:** That leads me to think of a question. You've outlined really well this interesting space within the ILWU for there to be radicalism, and also to be these institutional things, and also the tension between rank-and-file reform efforts and the institutional officers who sometimes have to take a stance based on labor laws or whatever.

[01:18:42] **CLARENCE:** That is absolutely correct.

[01:18:44] **HARVEY:** What's your philosophy about—at some points, I heard that you all were talking about not trying to change union legally for apartheid, I believe it was, where you wanted to bring it as a resolution. And sometimes, you're tying it to larger international or community labor struggles. How do you decide what strategy or tactic to use, and when?

[01:19:05] **CLARENCE:** That's a very good question. Let me just say this. I wasn't around it, but this is what I was told. The point that you bring up, Conor, about the contradiction of when you are an officer—and I was secretary-treasurer—your first obligation as an officer is to keep the union from being sued. Of course, it is.

[01:19:35] I always say that some of the best work that I've ever done in the ILWU was when I was not an officer; when I was out of office.

[01:19:47] You know what? Strong rank-and-file leadership makes for strong union leadership, because Harry always told the employers, when the employers said, "Harry, you're making these outrageous demands." He said, "It's not me, it's the rank-and-file. Even when they're wrong, they're right." [laughing]

[01:20:12] Because if you look back at the anti-apartheid struggle, Jimmy Herman wasn't initially on board with that. He talked about issues such as staying out of matters involving foreign policy. These are issues that are not part of our meat and potatoes that we should be addressing, and that there are various pitfalls that can happen.

[01:20:39] But because we have autonomy, which is so important, rank-and-filers can do things. We've seen examples of that. I would say that in terms of strategy, the leadership has plausible denial when rank-and-filers do things. They say, "That's not the official position of the leadership. The rank-and-file is entitled to be doing things." And they do, and I think that that's the way that it should work.

[01:21:20] I also think that you have to be strategic. Like when Leo Robinson made the amendment to not boycott the entire ship, but only to boycott the South African cargo. That was important. I think that there might have been some people who might have been hard left and might have disagreed with that and thought it was a compromise, but I don't think so. Being strategic is important.

[01:21:48] When we took the action regarding the 2008 port shutdown, I think maybe the first resolution might have been asking for 24 hours off, but it evolved to eight hours. I think that most of the time, we understand that there are things that we can do for 24 hours, but you don't have to do that to make the point.

[01:22:18] I've been involved in actions where the union didn't work for 24 hours. One of them that comes to mind was in 2011, I believe, when the Wisconsin workers' struggle was going on and the public sector work was in Wisconsin. On Dr. King's birthday, ILWU Local 10 did not take jobs on the day side.

[01:22:52] I'm pretty sure we may have asked the employers to give us the day off. They rejected that. I never will forget, I went to the hall that night. I went into the hall and I did not see one longshore worker in the hall. They said, "The day shift didn't work, we're not working either." The port was shut down for 24 hours. That was to show support for the workers in Wisconsin.

[01:23:29] I don't know if you remember this, Harvey and Conor, but the AFL-CIO took a position that there wasn't going to be any business as usual on Dr. King's birthday, in support of the workers in Wisconsin. But the ILWU didn't go to work. Local 10 didn't go to work. They brought charges against us. They dropped them, but they filed charges against us. Illegal work stoppage. I just remember that happening.

[01:24:00] My point is that the employer knows that if you do something for eight hours, you can do it for 24. I think the employers realized that. I think at the same time, strategically, for the ILWU members, I recall so very well in 2008, when we did not do any action to stop workers from going to work at [Military Ocean Terminal] Concord [MOTCO], where the military cargo is, that was a strategic decision.

[01:24:36] I know a lot of rank-and-filers love to go and work up there on the military [cargo] . They like getting paid overtime and work there. I didn't particularly, but workers do.

[01:24:48] The reality is we stopped the container movement cargo at the Port of Oakland. I think they may have had done the same in Concord that day, I'm not sure, but we weren't going to do anything to stop that and potentially lose the work that a lot of members are very fond of, up there in the military.

[01:25:08] That also deals with the whole question of working military cargo, and also working perishables and passenger terminals. I remember when I was secretary-treasurer in 2001, we were locked out, and we still worked the passenger vessels.

[01:25:25] I can remember so vividly [laughing] they wanted me to pay the folks who were linemen. I said, "Wait a minute. I can't be responsible for that. What I'll do is give you the names of the people. You have to take care of that on your end and you send the check to the union for us working." Because at that time, the employer had us locked out and they weren't doing anything but we worked those vessels.

[01:25:55] To your point, Conor, there are contradictions, but it can be handled. I'll just bring it up like this. During the EGT struggle, the leadership thought that the Occupy movement and those of us who were supporting it were disrespecting the ILWU's democracy.

[01:26:28] My response was, "Not at all, because the port is where we work, and those ports belong to the citizenry of those particular locations. Let's not get it twisted. People have a right to go there and to protest." We understood that the leadership had plausible denial. They were not organizing those protests.

[01:26:59] But at the same time, you had ILWU members who were supporting Occupy. I think that we could have gotten a lot more out of EGT by being more strategic around that question. We were even talking about having a caravan going up to the Pacific Northwest. That would have been quite a showdown. I don't know how that would have turned out.

[01:27:25] But one thing for sure, the employer respects rank-and-file solidarity. I go back once again to Ray Ortiz. When we had that caucus after the 2008 shutdown, he said the employers told him that they didn't think we could do it. They didn't think that we could get all hands on deck and get members to not go to work on May Day. Because there were some divisions. Local 13 was very reluctant to go out, but they did.

[01:28:04] Ray said that the tenor of the negotiations changed after May Day. He said, "That's when there was movement." I remember telling Ray and the delegates, "That wasn't our intention in doing May Day, but that was collateral damage." [laughing] That's what comes along with it, because the employer respects that. They respect rank-and-file unity. They do.

[01:28:42] We saw that during the contract negotiations when rank-and-filers at Local 10 didn't take jobs for three days. We also saw that happen when rank-and-filers at other ports didn't take jobs. I think that was critical to why the Secretary of Labor got involved with those contract negotiations.

[01:29:09] Willie didn't tell us to do this. Of course, he would never do that, but that certainly didn't come from on high. That came from rank-and-filers on their own who didn't take jobs. And I was very proud to see rank-and-filers doing that because that's old-school longshore rank-and-file organizing, and I still think that that's important.

[01:29:34] But, of course, I still believe that if you give the rank-and-file all the information, 99 times out of 100 they'll make the right decision. That might be an overstatement about the 99 percent of the time, but I still believe that if you give the rank-and-filers all the information, they'll make the decision. Sometimes they're not going to make the right decision, but I trust that they will, and that's the importance of rank-and-file democracy.

[01:30:08] As far as the EGT issue was concerned, I felt very strongly about supporting stopping Wall Street on the waterfront. That was really one of the clearest examples of how we could tie in what was going on in terms of corporate greed, income disparities and all the rest is when you take action at the point of production and point these things out.

[01:30:36] There was nothing more dramatic than what took place on the West Coast in regard to its relationship to Occupy. The ILWU gave it a great deal of support. Even with the leadership, they paid lip service. They wrote statements in support of Occupy. It came from James Hoffa, it came from Bob McElrath, a number of people wrote statements in support of Occupy.

[01:31:08] When the rank-and-file began to take that and run with it in some real way, there was resistance about that. I just said, "Hey, the leadership has plausible denial about this. They don't even have to be concerned with trying to quell, or trying to make any excuses, because it's a fact. Rank-and-filers have every

right to do what they want to do, which we do. And if that conflicts with what the leadership passes, it won't be the first time."

[01:31:43] But one thing I will say is that rank-and-filers are not reckless. Well, let me put it to you like this. [laughing] Let me clarify. [laughing] Because when they arrested Bob up there in the Pacific Northwest— but this is what I mean by that. They're very strategic, and calculating, and they know what they have to do. They're just not going to do things willy-nilly. There is something strategic in how we operate, even in our radicalness.

[01:32:17] **HARVEY:** How come we got hit with a secondary boycott at ICTSI [International Container Terminal Services, Inc.] ?

[01:32:44] **CLARENCE:** Harvey, let me just say this. There were things that happened with that situation in Portland that we in Local 10 would never have done in terms of how we would have confronted them to create a situation where there's paperwork and all this.

[01:32:45] There was always this thing with leadership in Local 10. "Oh, Clarence, we saw you speaking on KTVU." I said, "Yeah, I was speaking as a rank-and-filer. I didn't say I was speaking in the name of the ILWU Local 10. I have a right, as a rank-and-filer, to say things and express things if I have things on my mind."

[01:33:10] It's a way that you can explain. People want to talk to you because you're a longshore worker, and they know you've been around for a long time. If there's something that I can't say because—I said, "I'm not privy to the contract negotiations or what's going on, but what I do know is how longshore workers are feeling about being locked out, or how longshore workers view the contract negotiations going on. So, we have that right. No, we don't know what's going on necessarily in the room, but we certainly know what the mood is amongst rank-and-file."

[01:33:58] So, I think it's a matter of being strategic, and knowing what to say. If you don't have anything to say, then don't say anything, but if there's something that you think is important for people to know.

[01:34:10] I can recall so clearly, Harvey, when we got locked out in 2001, I was giving updates about what was going wrong with the contract negotiations, as much as I knew, on KPFA. David Bacon was interviewing me. When it got to the point where I didn't have any information, I just stopped going on the show. [laughing] Because there was nothing that I could say because I was in the dark about certain things.

[01:34:41] But one of the things that I remember so well is when the AFL-CIO leadership came out. The first thing they said is, "We want all of the community outreach that has been going on with ILWU Local 10 and other locals to continue because we've got to get the community on our side so that they all understand what's going on."

[01:35:09] I thought that there were good things that came out of that struggle during that lockout. We had a line. We had information. We had talking points that were disseminated up and down the coast. I can remember breaking a couple of them by talking about how I took issue with the employers discussing how much money we make because we pay for the movement of cargo with our lives. Many of us leave the industry with various

kinds of health maladies, from inhaling particulate matter, otherwise known as soot, from diesel fuel, or from being injured, or being killed. For the employer to talk about how much money we make was disrespectful.

[01:36:01] The leadership didn't want to hear anything about the money because they felt somewhat uncomfortable about some of the members who make these big salaries, but so be it. I disagreed with that. A video was put out called "The War on the Workers," and talked about these things. In later years, we had a savings lives committee, Harvey, that dealt with issues of cleaning up pollution on the waterfront, because not only do people who live around the port get sick and stuff, but so do our own members. So, it's important.

[01:36:40] Sometimes you disagree with the leadership, and you say things, but never would I say—we've had a few situations, like that anti-apartheid struggle, where people were being sued, or were going to be sued, for ending that boycott. The union was going to be sued. They were going to sue Leo Robinson, Howard Taylor, other people who were rank-and-filers, and the union. The government said, "Enough of this shit. This is stopping right now. We're not going to allow this anymore." They cut it off after 11 days.

[01:37:25] My response was that other unions should have stepped forward and done things. They couldn't just ride ILWU Local 10 and Local 34—other unions—but we still are in the belly of the beast. These contradictions between rank-and-filers and the leadership will always exist, and they should because the rank-and-file can say things that the leadership can't.

[01:37:57] Unless—unless—it's an action that has been taken by the caucus, or has been taken by the International Executive Board. Then they can say, "This is our position," like it was with the anti-apartheid struggle. But in other instances during the anti-apartheid struggle, they were not supporting it. They didn't get on board with it until it became in vogue for people to get arrested during lunchtime by going to the consulate, and they put the plastic things on you and gave you a ticket. By that time, the ILWU had done a lot of the heavy lifting, and had received the brunt of—and others understood.

[01:38:43] I think it's also important to say that people do evolve, and people do change—sometimes for the worse, a lot of times for the better—and their attitudes about something will, of course, change. I think we could look at the solidarity action on the part of the Palestinians to see that, Harvey, to see that changing. More trade unions are coming out calling for a ceasefire. Some are calling to discontinue military funding to Israel. Things are changing because people are out in the streets, and obviously, people are dying, so folks change.

[01:39:26] I think that the ILWU, we cannot forget what Harry Bridges told President Roosevelt when we didn't ship that scrap iron. He said, "Harry, stay out of foreign matters, foreign policy." Harry said, "That's our right. That's our privilege to do this." This is the president of the ILWU speaking to Franklin Delano Roosevelt this way.

[01:39:58] It's the working class that fights those wars—guys—and we also are the ones who oppose those wars when they need to be opposed. So, democracy is great, and I think that's a wonderful tradition. But at the same time, you have to exercise it in order for it to happen.

[01:40:30] **HARVEY:** Thank you very much for this.

[01:40:32] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, Harvey. This has been great. I guess this is going to be edited to some degree? No? [laughing] Get Conor out here!

[01:40:54] **HARVEY:** It gets transcribed.

[01:40:54] **CONOR:** When we transcribe it, it will probably not be exactly like we talk, but we will probably try to preserve it because all this stuff you talked about is really important. We can let you review the transcription, if you'd like, but I think everything is pretty perfect as it is.

[01:41:15] **CLARENCE:** I appreciate that. I will conclude with this. When we did the Danny Glover interview when he was made an honorary member, and even some of the issues that we discussed [about] the Palestinians, I was really surprised by some of the media. They did an excellent job of actually putting out what we said, and they sent young people to come to the hall.

[01:41:49] When there was a demonstration going on—quite recently, I was interviewed about October 6. Then, when they came out for Danny Glover's thing, and the things that I talked about, they actually had it on there. They didn't cut it out. I said, "Wow, young people, I guess they want to get the story."

[01:42:15] I've done so many interviews where most of that stuff ends up on the floor. [laughing]

[01:42:21] **HARVEY:** Once in a while, something sneaks through. Once in a while.

[01:42:25] I was interviewed by a local TV station at the time of the 2002 lockout, I think it was. They put it on the early afternoon news. I was trying to defend—explain—the union's position. This was what the union wanted, and it seems reasonable to me to say what they wanted.

[01:42:53] It goes on the six o'clock news, but then it was canceled out for the nine o'clock and the 11 o'clock news. I monitored it. It slipped through once and that was it. It's inconsistent.

[01:43:05] If you can get the point across, then who benefits from AI? Is it going to be a corporation or is it going to be workers and the population of the country? [If you] even get that question asked in some of the articles that celebrate the wonders of the technology, you're doing well if you can get a little bit in there.

[01:43:33] **CLARENCE:** That's true, Harvey. I think that there's so much that the ILWU has in the way of experience and expertise in being able to talk about these issues because of our role in negotiating these contracts, where we had Mechanization and Modernization and all the rest.

[01:43:55] I know Leo Robinson always believed that it was important for us, the ILWU—he described it as a think tank; that we would be able to have projections and analysis on what we think. For example, when Willie Adams meets with Joe Biden, we should be able to tell him what our view is of the waterfront in the coming years, and what we think is important for people to understand.

[01:44:29] Because it is the ILWU and the ILA members, of course—but I'm an ILWU retiree—who are responsible for making the ports productive, safe and efficient. We do that, not the port and not the employers. We're the ones that are out there making it all happen.

[01:44:53] The employers don't care about safety until somebody gets hurt. Then they want to blame the longshore worker. "You're driving too fast." "Well, you knew they were driving too fast all along, but you were, of course, concerned with production." But something happens. "Oh, you were speeding." Or "You didn't have your seatbelt on." Or "The brakes were bad." "Yeah, but you take the tractor and take it to the shop." "The brakes aren't working."

[01:45:23] So, we ultimately, as longshore workers, are responsible for everything that goes on at that port. We make it all happen. As a result of that, we deserve something for that, and there's no mistake about it. I've met longshore workers from all over the world. Longshore workers have a swagger about them—some might call it an arrogance—and it's because we know what we can do.

[01:45:56] It takes an ego to be able to operate a crane safely. You've got people's lives in your hands. We're fortunate that more accidents don't occur because it's a place where things happen so quickly. We deserve something for that. We're some of the most important workers in the world. I always make a point of letting folks know that, and how important it is, when I point to the shoes they're wearing and the cars they drive and the food they eat. [laughing]

[01:46:37] And I think that maritime workers have a long tradition of radicalism. Even people who were on the ships working as seamen. The hours that they could spend reading. That vessel was a microcosm of a society, and when you had people who had to work together and get along, no matter what their racial makeup might have been, that influenced how maritime workers thought and felt about things.

[01:47:18] Not to belabor the point, fellows, I don't know if there's anything I left out. There's probably something that I'm leaving out, but sometimes some things are left best unsaid. [laughing]

[01:47:27] **HARVEY:** I think you did very nicely, indeed. Thank you very much, Clarence, for going along with the program.

[01:47:32] **CLARENCE:** Thank you, Conor.

[01:47:33] **CONOR:** Thank you so much.

[01:47:34] **CLARENCE:** And I thank you, Harvey, for asking me to do this. I think this is very important for future generations of longshore workers and other people to write. I hope that there are going to be more workers that are going to write. I think that's important.

[01:47:52] I always say that no one can speak for a worker like a worker can speak for themselves. Not to say that you, Harvey, and Peter Cole—both of you I admire—but we, as workers, have to tell our own stories in our own way.

[01:48:14] **HARVEY:** I think that's the power of oral history, really.

[01:48:16] **CLARENCE:** It is the power of oral history, and it's a way of setting the record straight.

[01:48:26] People have different truths to tell. But to quote Leo again, he always said, "If you don't document your history, it didn't happen." People will revise it.

[01:48:43] That's why I thought that that conference at the University of Washington, "Reckoning with the Black Radical Tradition," was so important, because Peter Cole, Zach, Gabriel Prawl and myself—Peter Cole is an academic and a historian, but we were some of the labor activists at that event. That was important.

[01:49:13] **CONOR:** That's why we're here and we're so honored to be able to be the steward of your story to make sure that it's part of it, so thank you so much for pressing us to add your voice to those collections. We're going to be transcribing it and we'll be adding it to the PCPA oral history project. Thank you so much.

[01:49:31] **CLARENCE:** Okay, Conor. Thank you for your patience—and yours, too, Harvey. You guys stay well, man.

[01:49:37] **HARVEY:** Thanks, Clarence.

[01:49:38] **CLARENCE:** All right.